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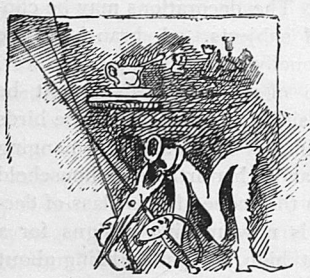
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ART NEEDLEWORK

CURTAINS, MANTEL-HANGINGS AND PIANO FRONTS.



RS. Elizabeth Glaister, the English woman who, with the aid of M. S. Lockwood, gave us the daintily printed and handsomely illustrated "Art Embroidery" — which on account of its high price is little known in this country—has lately produced a much smaller but, so far as the letter-press goes, no less practical book, modestly entitled "Needlework."*

This volume is cheap enough to be within the reach of all who practise art embroidery for pleasure or profit. The only drawback we find to the scope of its usefulness is that within the necessarily much-restricted space of the book, it has not been found practicable to give designs of working size for carrying out some of its excellent suggestions. Two of the illustrations which come nearest to being models of this sort we reproduce on this page. Both are very good. The chrysanthemum border will be found useful in many ways, for silk embroidery especially. The graceful border, Figure 2, is taken from the hangings of an old English bedroom, in which we are told that this beautiful circular flower is formed into circles, diamonds, or borders for the centres and edges of the coverlet, bed-head, valances, bed and window curtains, and a hanging for the toilet-table, all worked in deep lilac silk on white twill. Mrs. Glaister suggests that "this might be adapted to the needs of a modern bedroom with a dainty effect, rendering the room more interesting and its furniture more really valuable than could be done with the most expensive upholstery."

About a fourth of the contents of the volume is devoted to the subject of curtains. The writer justly complains that "curtains are generally too voluminous, so that they make a cumbrous heap by day, and by night the folds are too small and close, cutting the effect with too strong lines of shadow." "For an embroidered curtain," she says, "the width should not be greater than will allow the curtain to hang quite easily, when drawn over the window, and the length should allow it to lie on the floor for the few inches that are needful to keep out the draught. They should be hung from poles, or

brass rods, with rings, and for a small window it will often be convenient and seemly to have one curtain only, to draw over the whole window space. The embroidery should certainly be worked on the material of the curtain itself. It may seem a little cumbrous, but it is not fine stitching, and it can almost always be done in the hand, and so is not more inconvenient than a

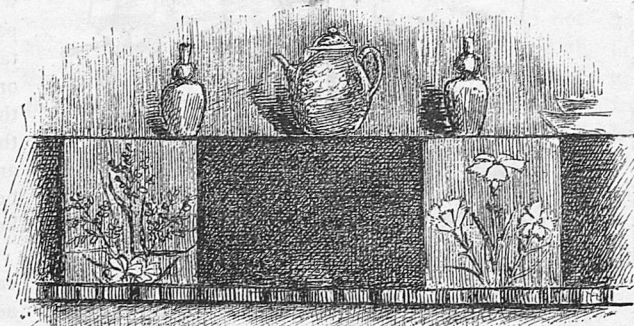


FIG. 1.—MANTEL-HANGING.

smaller piece of work in the frame, and the appearance of the curtains thus worked is so superior to those ornamented with bands of work, that the increased trouble ought not to be considered. There are some exceptions, as when work is done on dado pieces of another material, and the horizontal band is perhaps repeated higher up; but it is well to remember that the general effect of an embroidered curtain, both as a decoration and as a drapery, is better when the work is distributed over the whole surface of it than when a part only is embroidered, and when the folds in which it naturally hangs are not disturbed by the increased stiffness of an applied material."

As to materials for curtains, Mrs. Glaister says: "Serge or diagonal cloth is an excellent material for worked curtains. It is a true and well-woven stuff, it falls in good folds, and it is soft and pleasant to work on. It will bear a rich ornament in filose, or in applied velvet, and it is particularly 'kindly' with crewel. It has a good range of tone and color, and the middle tints in it are deep without being heavy. Velvet, or rather velveteen, is also a beautiful material for curtains. It is very durable, and it takes the work very well. Filose is the best for the embroidery, the sheen of the silk brightening a material apt to be sombre in its richness. If crewel be used on velvet, which is not much to be advised, the ground being too rich for the ornament, it should be heightened here and there with silk. Velvet does not bear applied work well; the pile interferes with the neat execution—if used, the ornament should be in velvet also, in silk or in satin—the last perhaps the best."

For serge and cloth curtains repeated patterns are recommended as looking very well carried over the whole of the curtain, and bordered with a few simple lines near the edges. "Sometimes a star or roundel, or a few transverse bars between the lines, finish the curtain well. This work may be done in crewel or in filose, or, the main part of the work being in crewel, the centres of each pattern or star may be in filose, which will brighten the whole effect. These patterns will look well all in one color, or two or more shades of the same color may be used; a variety of color will not suit them. A great advantage of these repeated patterns is that the curtain looks well when drawn back from the window, as what is lost in one fold is shown in another, and the beholder is not irresistibly driven to spread them out in order to solve the mystery of disjointed pieces of ornament."

Branching patterns are also commended as very well adapted for curtains; they will suit any materials. Such large flowers and leaves on stems that rise from the base line of the curtain, as shown in the illustration on the opposite page, "cover the whole space with a noble damasking which modifies the tone of the ground." "It goes well," we are told, "with a Queen Anne style

of decoration, and is found in curtains of her time. A fine set was lately worked in this style on a rich cream-colored satin, which had a beautiful sheen. The ornament is in filose, of a deep gold color. Some bordering lines are also needed for this kind of pattern.

"A third kind of ornament is the placing of detached sprays or single flowers at fitting distances over the curtain, called in heraldry a powdering. Great care must be taken with these sprigs or they will have a spotty effect, one of the most annoying that can be produced. To avoid it they should not contrast too sharply in color with the ground; the fact of their embroidery, even if in nearly the same color as the curtain, is sufficient to make them tell.

"Another and very good style for curtains is to put on a dado of another material or color. The depth of this dado should be determined with regard to the walls of the room; if they have a dado, that on the curtains should be nearly of the same height; if the walls have a division high up, with a frieze above the patterned paper, the curtains will probably look better in another style. For a large and lofty room, the broad band of a darker color on the curtains looks very well; it should be of a darker shade of the same color as the curtain, or at least harmonize with it, as a warm brown with a deep red will often do.

"For the ornament, a row of upright stems of large flowers boldly embroidered or in applied work is very handsome, and this may be worked on the dado before

it is sewn on the curtain. The body of the curtain may be plain or may be worked with single flowers of the same kind or corresponding in color to those below, always remembering the caution given above with regard to sprigs. If the dado be ornamented and the rest of the curtain left plain, it may be improved by a band of the same stuff as the dado and about a fourth of its width, embroidered to correspond with it, and placed about its own width from the top of the curtain. The whole may be further enriched by narrow borders of stitches where the bands are sewn on to the curtain, or with woven braids or laces, as the upholsterers call them. The colors of these should be carefully chosen; perhaps the middle tints of the embroidery will

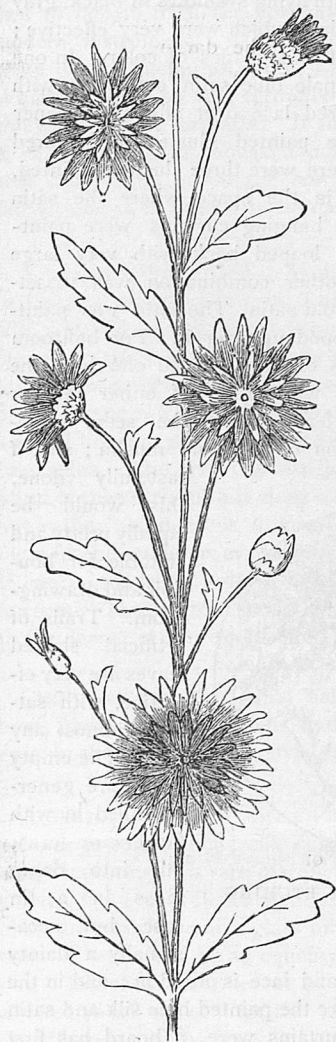


FIG. 3.—CHRYSANTHEMUM BORDER.

give the best shades." Perpendicular arrangements of ornament are not advised for curtains. The writer truly says that "they seldom have a pleasing effect, for they carry the eye mounting up to an uncomfortable height where there is nothing further to gratify it."

The curtains spoken of by the writer up to this point are deep in color and substantial in material, while the

* NEEDLEWORK. By Elizabeth Glaister. With illustrations. London and New York: Macmillan & Co., 1880. Price 90 cents.

decoration is mainly light upon a darker ground. Besides this more massive style, some beautiful hangings designed on an opposite principle—the ground light and the ornament dark—are described. The pattern should not be very massive and heavy for this kind of work, we are told, “or it will look too substantial for the ground, and also this kind of curtain will be used where a somewhat light decoration is required; for a drawing-room, in the richer materials, and for a morning-room, boudoir, or bedroom, in the simpler ones.”

Of these latter the writer believes that there is no better material than linen sheeting, unbleached if possible; twilled and diapered linen is also recommended. “Linen will take filose, and is good enough in itself for careful work, being the most durable of all our materials. The browner kinds also make good curtains. Cotton sheeting makes pretty and inexpensive curtains, and its color and softness recommend it much; but if you are going to take much pains with your curtains and put a good deal of work upon them, a silk or linen material is much better. These light-colored materials look best with a pattern that covers them all over, though it need not be an elaborate one. Beautiful curtains in a Queen Anne style, and adapted from old work of her time, are done in large flowers in outline, with the ground darned in lines, which look all the better for some irregularity both in the length of the stitches and the closeness of the lines. The color of this sort of work is variously managed. It looks well in monochrome, ground and flowers alike; a fine set has been done with the flowers in dull yellow, with the darning in dull blue. Another curtain has the flowers of a deep greenish blue, with the ground darned in the dull or broken yellow; and a third, which has a handsome leaf pattern in blue, has the darning in slightly varying shades of yellow. For more varied colors, chintzes of the early part of this century will give good suggestions of pattern. A light pattern of carnations running over the whole looks very well, the flowers in several shades of red and red-pink, and the leaves and stalks in one, or at most two shades of green. This would be dainty enough for silk, or would suit fine linen, with the work in silk.”

In regard to hangings for mantels, Mrs. Glaister says—and all persons of taste, we think, will agree with her—that “when the chimney-piece is a work of art in marble or wood, it is better without any hangings at all; but when it is ugly, mean, or pretentious, of gloomy black, chilly white, or unsympathetic gray marble, or of uninteresting stone, it is greatly improved by a hanging, which may be made very pleasant to the eye by well-arranged embroidery.”

It is advised to have the ground color neither light nor dark. The writer truly remarks: “These middle tints are much neglected in ordinary decoration, whence the obtrusive and worrying effect of much modern needlework, done with crewels, but not with art. It may not be quite so easy to arrange the colors of the ornament well on this middle tint, for unity and harmony of effect are often secured by making all the ornament tell, dark on light or light on dark, which is not easy when many colors and shades are used on a ground of a medium shade; but it can be done, and the difficulty once overcome, the result will probably be very happy. We must remember that for an object at which we shall constantly look in moments of repose, a gentle gradation of tone and quiet harmony of color will have a far more restful effect than cutting contrasts; and again, the repose we desire will be better secured by a repeated and conventional pattern which is understood at once, than by the exciting variety of, say, a wreath of various flowers so naturally treated that every one is different, and requires a special effort of the mind to comprehend it.”

Mrs. Glaister thinks that among the most successful mantel-hangings she has seen are conventional patterns of one color in silk on a ground of a darker shade; some are upright groups of flowers springing from a base line; “others are running patterns of flower branches, going each way from the centre where the ends cross or are tied with a ribbon knot, carefully drawn. One of the latter is in yellow silks, on velvet of a deep gold color. Gold braid and thread look very well on the same velvet, the pattern should be a very stiff one; an arrangement of circles suits the material very well. If the

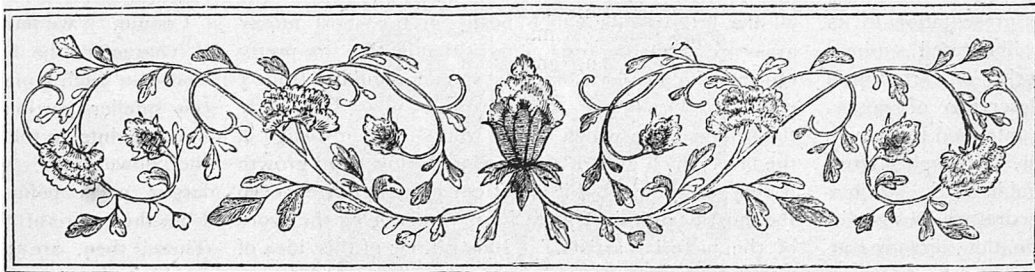


FIG. 4.—DESIGN FOR A PIANO FRONT.

chimney-piece be a long one, it is better to have a centre to the pattern with the ornament running each way; if, on the contrary, an appearance of greater width be desired, the pattern should be continuous. The hanging should not be too deep—a common fault—and the width of the pattern should be proportioned to it. Fringes, cords, and braids for finishing should be very sparingly used. An edge of deep button-hole stitches in one or more of the silks used for the work will often make a good and sufficient edge. If two or more silks are used, work the first color in stitches rather wide apart, and then place between them the

the corners of the shelf; they should be completed in the length, and a detached spray or group to correspond worked at each end. A running pattern without a centre may be taken all round. A Renaissance or cinque-cento pattern will look well for this; it will be a more lasting gratification to the eye than any arrangement of naturally treated flowers, and will have a more ‘chosen,’ thoughtful, and scholarly effect. Gold brocette silk, with a pattern in this style applied in crimson velvet, edged with a fine cord or thick silk, or better still, sewn down with gold twist, is recommended as

looking very handsome and being quickly done. These hangings may be effectively arranged in panels; the ground divided into squares by rows of braid or stitches, and an ornament worked in each; or panels of a lighter shade than the ground laid on, and worked with suitable designs (as shown in Figure 1). If each panel has a different ornament they should not differ too widely from each

other, but have the same coloring, and be in a corresponding style. The applied panels should be edged with a narrow ribbon lace, which may often with advantage connect the panels by the upper and lower edges, so as to bring all together.” Mrs. Glaister thinks that it is a good plan to have a change of these hangings. “When one room is much occupied the occasional variety is very pleasant,” she says; but we do not agree with her on this point. We would rather recommend the selection, in the first place, of a good unobtrusive design on a quieting, unobtrusive background, and once in position let the hanging remain there until, from excess of wear or for the purposes of cleanliness, it has become necessary to replace it by another.

The pretty fashion of taking out the meaningless fretwork in the fronts of upright pianos and putting in a piece of embroidery is becoming so general that the following hints on the subject will be read with interest: “The color of the ground should harmonize with the color of the wood, and the design should be carefully adapted to the space it is to occupy, the rigid boundary of the framework making this especially important in this case. A great characteristic of good design is this careful proportioning of the ornament to the place it is to occupy, and regarding of the lines that are to confine it. If you study any known good design, you will notice how this is done, often very unobtrusively, sometimes with much knowledge and skill, sometimes quite unconsciously; a leaf is pushed out toward a corner, or a spray is bent down from a line, not violently stopped or cut off, but just acknowledging the needful limits. The want of this care mars many a piece of needlework begun with a good intention. The amateur has made a life-like drawing of flowers; they are harmoniously colored and beautifully wrought; but the piece is ‘all wrong’ in understanding eyes because the principles of design have not only been departed from, but the worthy person had not even suspected that such things were.”

The piano front, the writer goes on to say, “should be in fine materials, fine linen, silk or satin; velvet is too heavy, and would deaden the sound, and for the same reason embroidery of a light character is better for the purpose than applied work.” The piano front of the illustration is made of “gold-



FIG. 5.—DESIGN FOR A CURTAIN WITH DADO.

colored soft silk; the shell-like petals of the flowers are all worked in blue silk, pale at the edge, white in the middle, and the vein markings in very dark blue; the leaves are for the most part worked in a soft gray-green, excepting here and there where a bronze shade is introduced; the leaf stalks and veinings are of the same bronze green. The scroll stem is done in two shades of bronze, the lighter one being also used for the calyx of some of the flowers; there is no border worked to this design, the framework of the piano itself being sufficient for it.”

stitches of another color or shade. It is better to let the drapery hang like a table-cloth at the corners, than to have it fitted round the shelf. Often it is better still to make it just the length of the shelf, so that, fastened to the wall at the back, it hangs down in front only. This last plan is the most becoming to the work, but it is not always practicable; if the ends of the chimney-piece project far into the room or are much seen, they must be covered. If the hanging be fitted round the shelf, and the pattern chosen be one that has a centre, the ends of the pattern must not be continued round